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SUBJECT: Kabilia, SRSG/P-3 plus two and Angola discuss East, Rwanda ties, Kony, food shortages, and air safety

REF: 07 KINSHASA 1409

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On May 2 President Kabilia met with SRSG Doss, ambassadors of the P-3 plus 2 nations, and Angola, the first meeting in this format in 2008. Kabilia and the European ambassadors expressed disappointment - without explicitly blaming each other - for slow movement on economic development. Kabilia evinced a clear understanding of the major challenges he faces and appeared more relaxed than at previous SRSG/P-3 plus 2 fora. He promised to hold monthly meetings with the group, also agreeing to instruct his economic development team to meet with the donor community to discuss a request from European donors to monitor progress in this area, a possible sign that current tensions between donors and recipients, heretofore characterized by mutual recriminations of inaction, may transition to a more collaborative phase. The president did not seem anxious over what the SRSG and ambassadors fear is a looming food shortage crisis in the DRC. Kabilia was upset by Rwandan president Kagame's absence in New York in April and blamed Rwanda for failure to take steps to renew DRC-Rwanda diplomatic ties. Kabilia said it was time to bring under control ("maitriser") Ugandan rebel leader Joseph Kony by military force and asked for intelligence on Kony and his men. Kabilia did not, however, intimate he would invite Uganda to take part in efforts to deal with Kony. SRSG noted, and Kabilia concurred, that provincial and local elections cannot be held until 2009. Angola's presence at the meeting, requested by Kabilia, possibly signals an effort to bring greater North-South balance to these P-3 plus 2 meetings. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) For the first time in 2008 Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) President Joseph Kabilia met with the UN Secretary General's Special Representative (SRSG) and representatives of the UN Security Council's Permanent Three (P-3) members (U.S., UK, France), together with non-permanent SC members Belgium and South Africa ("plus 2"). Also invited, at Kabilia's request, was the Angolan charge d'affaires (the ambassador is currently absent), the first time that country has participated in a P-3 plus two meeting. DRC officials at the meeting included Foreign Minister Antipas Mbusa, presidential chief of staff Raymond Tshibanda, diplomatic advisor Marcellin Chissambo, and roving ambassador Seraphin Ngwej. The meeting was the first for new SRSG Alan Doss. All P-3 plus two nations were represented at the ambassadorial level.

Situation in the East

¶3. (SBU) Doss began with a presentation on the four areas of concern (his statement was coordinated with the P-3 plus two ambassadors and Angolan representatives at a meeting the day before), giving a short summary of each. Doss specified each area: the situation in the DRC's eastern region; economic development issues; air safety and provincial/municipal elections. On the situation in the East of the country, Doss reviewed developments since the last Kabilia-SRSG/P-3 plus 2 meeting on December 20, 2007

(reftel) highlighting efforts to implement the December 9, 2007 Nairobi Communiqué and the agreements reached January 23) at the National Conference in Goma (the "Amani Process"). The SRSG expressed guarded optimism that efforts to bring about an end to the fighting in the East were progressing but noted that much remained to be done. He expressed satisfaction that the Defense Minister, who originally resisted the idea, has agreed to create thematic groups to approach the issue of military reform and military action against militias in the East. He noted that gender-based violence continues to be a major problem and also referred to a new area of concern, i.e., recent violence in the western province of Bas-Congo.

Doss stated that the Bas-Congo was very different from the Democratic Republic of the Congo's eastern region and that progress in economic development would go a long way to solving the Bas-Congo problem.

¶ 15. (SBU) The French and Belgian ambassadors referred to bilateral programs their countries are sponsoring to train a DRC rapid reaction force (RRF), including a French program now underway in the Bas-Congo as part of an effort to create a military force for humanitarian relief efforts within member nations of the Africa Union's Economic Community of Central Africa States (French acronym: CEEAC). The French ambassador noted that the French-trained contingent could be deployed to the East if necessary. Both ambassadors also congratulated the GDRC for the defense minister's willingness to set up thematic groups to discuss Security Sector Reform (SSR), a decision which could contribute to enhancing the military's effectiveness in going after the militia groups.

¶ 16. (SBU) The British ambassador noted that the current situation is an improvement over that when the President last met with the

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SRSG/P-3 plus 2, if only because there now exists a "global plan" against insurgent forces, a plan that included Nkunda, the FDLR and all other groups. He asked Kabila how the P-3 plus two might help in implementing the plan. He also expressed concern over the continuing problem of gender-based violence and asked the President for his thoughts on P-3 plus two help in this area as well. The South African ambassador asked Kabila for his analysis of the situation in the East four months after the signing of the Goma agreements and what the international community might do specifically to help. The U.S. ambassador praised Kabila for his leadership in trying to implement the Nairobi and Goma accords and reiterated requests from the UK and South African ambassadors that he, Kabila, specify what specific actions the P-3 plus two might take to help the DRC.

¶ 17. (SBU) Responding to Doss' and the ambassadors' comments and questions, Kabila noted with satisfaction that Father Apolinnaire Malu Malu, his choice to oversee implementation of the Amani process, was doing a good job. The ceasefire, albeit fragile, was holding. Nonetheless, the "point of no return," which Kabila described as the time when so many militia members will have been demobilized that further fighting will not be possible, has not yet been reached. On July 23, the six-month date from the signing of the Goma agreement, a comprehensive evaluation of all efforts will be carried out. He referred to upcoming meetings in Rome and Kinshasa with the ex-FAR/FDLR to persuade those groups' leaders to demobilize. This will "give people a chance to avoid fighting." He emphasized that "our vision on stability in East has not ever changed. The process in place is the way forward," he stressed, but "is not the only way." He also emphasized the need to address impunity and punish criminals; failure to do so, he stated, was to fail to give the state the authority it needed to end the insurgency in the East once and for all.

¶ 18. (SBU) On SSR, Kabila acknowledged he personally had not played an active role on this issue but instead had waited for donors to come forward with their proposals for help. He thanked the French ambassador for France's training of a RRF battalion, but noted that much more was needed. In a lighter moment, he said he was not good in math, but "if we only train battalions one by one it will take quite some time to get where we need to be." He continued: "I am a man in a hurry on military training. And I also want a plan to train Congolese trainers." He then alluded to the sad state of

Congolese institutes for senior training, lamenting that many such entities simply no longer exist, including a senior staff college for military officers, a special school for engineers, senior management, etc.

Missed meeting with Kagame; relations with Rwanda

¶9. (SBU) Doss and several ambassadors raised the importance of restoring diplomatic relations between the DRC and Rwanda as called for under the Nairobi Communiqué. The Angolan charge asked Kabila if he was disappointed over the absence of Rwandan president Kagame in New York recently at what was expected to be a summit between the two leaders to discuss progress on a peace agreement in the East. He also asked the president for his take on the results of the meetings in New York. The Belgian ambassador criticized Rwanda for its lack of cooperation in providing a list of FDLR suspects. The U.S. ambassador referred to U.S. efforts to get the Rwandans to cooperate with the DRC on demobilization. SRSG Doss "deplored" Kagame's failure to appear in New York. Kabila replied that "it is very irritating when partners are not sincere." He asked rhetorically "Are the Rwandans really for peace? Who knows? Is the ex-FAR or the DRC the problem? No, but the Rwandans want us to solve their problem for them." On restoring diplomatic ties, Kabila said in essence that the Rwandans had not taken the steps needed to show they are interested in restoring ties and that the DRC could not be expected to do this unilaterally. It was necessary and important to have relations with Rwanda, Kabila stressed, but this must proceed in stages and Rwanda had to do its part.

Time to take care of Kony by force

¶10. (SBU) In discussing fighting in the East, Kabila volunteered that the time had come to use force to deal with ("maîtriser" in French) the continued predations in the DRC of the renegade faction of the Lord's Resistance Army headed by Joseph Kony. Failure to remove Kony immediately, Kabila asserted, would mean he will continue to recruit Congolese to fight for him. Kabila made an appeal for help in obtaining intelligence on Kony and his movements but did not leave an opening for possible Ugandan intervention in this effort.

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Economic Development and looming food shortages

¶11. (SBU) Several ambassadors asked Kabila if he would consider setting up a meeting with the donor community to establish mechanisms to review progress on all fronts of Kabila's ambitious economic development agenda (the five priority sectors for economic and human development, or "cinq chantiers" in French). Without stating their reasons for the meeting request or blaming the DRC explicitly, the French and Belgian ambassadors clearly hinted there was frustration (with the Congolese) over failures to move forward on development projects. Avoiding the defensive posture he assumed in past meetings with the SRSG/P-3 plus two on this sensitive issue, Kabila said simply: Yes, we understand your frustration, because we, the Government and the people of the Congo, are also very frustrated," referring specifically to the need for "broken promises" of funding to repair infrastructure. The UK ambassador made similar comments but cast them in a different light. Noting that Kabila had spoken on Millennium development goals in early April in New Delhi, he said he would welcome "your leadership in the area of economic development to achieve more urgency, more coordination, and more accountability to you." Kabila then surprised his interlocutors by saying that he was willing to set up a meeting to discuss development. He did not state, however, whether he agreed the meeting would set up the evaluation mechanisms requested by the French and Belgians. He stipulated that he would not attend the meeting but would make sure that the highest-ranking members of his development affairs team would be there and requested that the meeting take place before May 15 (no reason for that date was given).

¶12. (SBU) The British ambassador noted that the emerging world food crisis was like a "traffic accident in slow motion." Coordination was needed to prepare a response to higher prices and shortages. The South African ambassador followed, noting that in South Africa and Senegal special mechanisms were recently created to deal with this issue and asked if similar structures existed in the DRC. The U.S. ambassador assured the president that the U.S. stood ready to help in this area. "What can we do?" he asked pointedly. Kabila replied that his government believed that the solution to food shortages in the Congo, which had tremendous agricultural potential, was to increase food production. He noted that this year the government was buying 500 tractors to mechanize production in an effort to speed up the availability of locally grown food. He expressed confidence the GDRC could meet this challenge and noted that it has approached the FAO for technical support. He also mentioned the need to improve roads to get produce to markets. Kabila added that an important contribution to the solution would be for countries that export food stop turning their food into fuel, thereby causing food shortages in the countries they export to. Attempting to inject humor into his comments, Kabila said the issue was one of "starving to death in the poor countries due to a lack of food," or "dying in the rich countries from climate change because of putting too many hydrocarbon emissions into the air."

Air Safety

¶13. (SBU) Doss and European ambassadors mentioned heightened concerns over air safety in light of the April 15 crash of a DC-9 in Goma. The French and Belgian ambassadors noted that the problem was not related to equipment and infrastructure problems only, but also to a lack of enforcement of air transportation safety regulations by DRC officials. The French ambassador called for setting up a working group to stimulate the adoption of corrective measures in the aviation sector. Kabila responded only that his Minister of Transportation would brief the government on May 5 on all aspects of the problem and on possible solutions.

Provincial, local elections

¶14. (SBU) SRSG Doss referred to a review he has made of the status of preparations for provincial and local elections, the last step in the popular selection of DRC leaders as called for under the new constitution. Although it was widely believed these elections would be held in the second half of 2008, this would not be possible given a number of obstacles. Doss did not elaborate on the obstacles, except to mention that electoral lists needed updating. Doss stated it was important, however, to hold the elections as soon as possible, preferably by the summer of 2009. Kabila said he had not foreseen that such important obstacles existed but now recognized that the postponement until 2009 was necessary. He urged Doss to use the 2005 electoral list as the basis for the upcoming polls;

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Doss agreed the 2005 list would indeed be updated.

¶15. (SBU) Comment: Throughout the meeting Kabila was clearly in command of the subject matter and at ease with his interlocutors, even using humor at several junctures. There was no repeat here of the tense appearance and defensive posture he has assumed at previous meetings of this group, which the president has almost certainly viewed as a continuation of the old and, for him, meddlesome CIAT mechanism (the Sun City accords-created body to ensure international community participation in the DRC's transition to democratic rule). Pleasant surprises at the May 2 meeting were Kabila's voluntary announcements that he would meet monthly with the SRSG and P-3 plus 2, that his economic development team would meet with the donor community, and that he believes the time has come to use force in dealing with Kony. Disappointing was his lack of appetite to take the initiative in renewing diplomatic relations with Rwanda, although domestic political opposition here to renewed ties helps explain his passivity on this front. Angola's presence at the meeting is new; we suspect Kabila may see the addition to the group of his neighbor and ally as a way to achieve greater North-South balance within the P-3 plus two setting. End Comment.